



February 26, 2024

*Submitted via email*

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Christopher Wray  
Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C., 20535

Dear Secretary Mayorkas, Secretary Becerra, and Director Wray:

The United States needs to stop handing over children to “[probable traffickers](#).” President Biden’s border crisis has reached never-before-seen levels. Even worse, we now learn that the Department of Health and Human Services cannot [find](#) more than 85,000 migrant children who entered our country over the last two years. Reports [show](#) that many of those children have been forced into the labor market, where they work debilitating hours under dangerous conditions in violation of child-labor laws or are sex trafficked. Senator Chuck Grassley recognized this problem and asked the Department of Homeland Security for a plan [more than three months](#) ago, but no plan has been forthcoming. That is unacceptable.

Recognizing the ongoing crisis, the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Inspector General released a [grim report acknowledging](#) major problems with safety concerns for unaccompanied children. That report explained that for more than one-in-five children required sponsor safety checks were not timely performed. In more than one-third of the cases, IDs submitted by sponsors [raised concerns](#). Some

children were released without home studies—to homes investigators later found to be [vacant or nonresidential](#).

We, the undersigned attorneys general of Iowa, Mississippi, Utah, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia write because there is reason to believe that some of the 85,000 missing children are being trafficked. That cannot continue. But since this news surfaced, neither the Department of Health and Human Services nor the Department of Homeland Security has offered a plan for identifying and protecting those vulnerable children. Trafficking minors cannot continue. We demand a response to this crisis.

Parents send their children alone to the United States for a better life. Some come to escape war, others to escape gangs or violence. By law, the Department of Health and Human Services is [responsible](#) for keeping these children safe when they arrive. That responsibility includes reuniting children with family or placing them with a sponsor who will protect them from trafficking and exploitation.

But that Department is not living up to its responsibilities, and the cost of that failure is tens of thousands of missing children. It [loosened vetting procedures](#). Instead, thousands of children have now fallen victim to [forced labor and sex trafficking](#). They spend their time in this country working dangerous and sometimes inhumane jobs. They are deprived of necessities like sleep and food and denied an education. Some even face life-altering injuries and death.

One recent example is a sixteen-year-old who was [crushed](#) under an earthmover near Atlanta. Another example is a [fourteen-year-old](#) was hit by a car while delivering food on a bike in Brooklyn. And another—a fifteen-year-old died on his first day of work for a roofing company when he [fell 50 feet](#). There are also numerous examples of young women brought across the border in Texas only to be placed immediately into sex trafficking rings. In a country that claims to value both children and the rule of law, this cannot happen.

Our States have a strong interest in enforcing the law within our borders. That includes ensuring that companies follow child labor laws and legal guardians comply with child abuse and neglect laws. We are also dedicated to fighting against human trafficking and are outraged that victims now include children that were in the federal government's care.

To better support our efforts, we respectfully request answers to the following questions, in writing, by May 1, 2024:

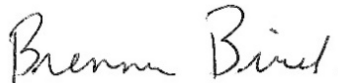
1. Where were the 85,000 missing children last seen? What efforts are being taken to locate them?
2. What percentage of migrant children are ending up with their parents once they enter this country?

3. What safeguards are in place to ensure that family members or other sponsors with whom children are placed in the U.S. are, in fact, the relations they claim to be?
4. What processes are in place to avoid placing children with human traffickers or other individuals that a pose a risk to children?
5. What factors are considered when determining whether a potential sponsor of a migrant child is suitable to provide for the child's physical and mental well-being?
6. What follow-up does the Government perform to ensure that children are not being abused, and how frequent is this follow-up? If you determine that a migrant child has fallen victim to sex trafficking, how do you ensure that the victim receives the necessary treatment? Are states' victims' advocates notified?

The Department of Health and Human Services must ensure that it is not handing over children to criminals and sex traffickers. It cannot do so if it does not know to whom it is handing these children. Even worse, is that it appears to have no idea where those children are being sent. Missing children must be identified, and potential sponsors must be vetted.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter. We look forward to your response no later than May 1, 2024.

Sincerely,



Brenna Bird  
Attorney General of  
Iowa



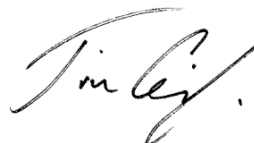
Lynn Fitch  
Attorney General of  
Mississippi



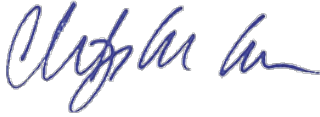
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